

## **FirstNet, Texas sign 700 MHz spectrum-lease pact for Harris County LTE network**

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In a special board meeting held via teleconference, the First Responder Network Authority finally approved a spectrum manager lease agreement (SMLA) with the state of Texas for Harris County's LTE-based public-safety network, which uses 700 MHz spectrum licensed to FirstNet.

No other business was taken up during the meeting. FirstNet board members did not address why negotiations with Harris County took more than a year, though it was widely understood that county and state officials wanted to ensure that Harris County would retain operational control of the network during the lease term.

"The goal was to have a three-year SMLA, to be able to allow the lessons learned to be continually gained from this system and to make sure that we're leveraging the investment that has been put in place with the Harris County, Texas, system," said board member TJ Kennedy, who is also FirstNet's acting general manager.

FirstNet board member Tim Bryan, perhaps aiming to assuage any concerns from the public that Harris County might have received special treatment, said during the meeting that he found the Texas SMLA "to be very similar in virtually every respect" to other SMLAs that FirstNet previously signed with the Los Angeles-Regional Interoperable Communications System (LA-RICS), the state of New Mexico, the New Jersey Department of Treasury and Adams County, Colo.

Sue Swenson, the board chairwoman, replied that she appreciated Bryan's comment because "it's important for people to realize that it's similar in content and focus."

The four jurisdictions that signed SMLAs before Texas did had all received grants from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Broadband Technologies Opportunity Program to build broadband public-safety networks. Harris County is not a BTOP grantee but received money for its network from a federal port security grant and from a federal

emergency-management fund.

The Harris County network is the nation's first operationally deployed LTE-based public-safety network using Band 14 spectrum. In the absence of a lease agreement with FirstNet, the county has operated its network for two years under special temporary authority (STA) from the FCC. STAs are granted for only 180 days, meaning Harris County has had to request extensions each time the STA was due to expire. Kennedy noted that the current STA extension will expire Aug. 24.

Todd Early, deputy assistant director of the Texas Department of Public Safety, told IWCE's *Urgent Communications* that Harris County now intends to expand its public-safety LTE network from 14 sites to 93 sites, which should cover the entire county.

The Harris County public-safety LTE network was built by Motorola Solutions, which was also selected earlier this year to develop an LTE-based broadband network for LA-RICS, the first jurisdiction to approve a Band 14 spectrum-lease pact with FirstNet.

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